

# **AMHERST REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

## **MINUTES**

**April 14, 2010**

<b>LOCATION:</b>	First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	John Coull, Aaron Hayden, Margaret Roberts. Members Lawrence Kelley and Jeanne Traester absent
<b>OTHERS PRESENT:</b>	Cinda Jones and Sarah la Cour (W.D. Cows), Walter Wolnik, Felicity Hardee, L. Michael Alpert, James Donovan, Ryan Donovan, Scott Merzbach (Daily Hampshire Gazette)
<b>STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director)

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The meeting was called to order at 7:45 p.m. when a quorum was achieved.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of March 10, 2010 were approved by unanimous acclamation.

### **Appearance**

Cinda Jones of W.D. Cows provided handouts and presented a vision of redevelopment for North Amherst Village which included architecture responding to the mill history of the village, which had been known as the “Dirty Hands” district. W.D. Cows is a major landowner in the north end of the village. Its historic sawmill operation had recently ceased, leaving a large (7.14 acre) property with a 14,000 sq. ft. vacant building in the center, which she described as a potential anchor. Ms. Jones requested the ARA’s help in pursuing redevelopment of the village. Redevelopment could be planned all at once and pursued in phases. Some help would be needed for brown fields remediation, water and sewer utilities, roadway (intersection) improvements, and other infrastructure. Public funding for a central parking garage would help support private activity nearby. Ms. la Cour indicated that the current zoning is a hodge-podge of numerous, uncoordinated districts which do not add up to a village center.

Mr. Hayden noted that North Amherst Village was one of the priority areas the ARA had identified, and would need to be coordinated with the nearby Patterson PRP project. Mrs. Roberts agreed that the area needed help to become a functioning village center. She said some steps were needed to get there, but many of the elements were present, including concentrated population and public facilities (library, post office). It was ripe for redevelopment.

Mr. Coull joked that he wasn’t sure the ARA could help here, because the village had a different zip code. He said redevelopment as a village center made complete sense as an urban renewal project. The fact that there were several like-minded owners helped.

Mrs. Roberts asked if the redevelopment would occur without ARA help. Mr. Tucker replied that there were some brown fields issues in several locations in the village which prevented property owners from moving forward.

Ms. Jones and Ms. La Cour indicated that there were several smaller property owners who were interested, as well.

Mr. Coull said that the use of form-based zoning would be critical. Mr. Hayden said there would be value in having the ARA drive a comprehensive plan for the village in tandem with the planning board. It would serve a role in implementing the Master Plan, pulling all of the pieces together that the scattered zoning now represents.

Mrs. Roberts asked how the ARA would proceed. What funding was available to support the effort? Mr. Coull replied that there were three big projects on the drawing boards at the moment—the Patterson PRP, the Gateway District, and North Amherst. Mr. Tucker indicated that the ARA had a little over \$58,000 in its own funds remaining, and there were grant programs. Mrs. Roberts indicated that there had been past questions about limitations on the use of one of the accounts, and asked staff to look into that question.

Ms. Jones indicated that W.D. Cows had a potential partner for its project that could work with staff. She thanked the Authority for hearing her presentation.

### **Gateway District Project**

Mr. Coull described the contents of the “Urban Form Analysis” document prepared by the ACP Visioning, Master Plan consultants, which included a sample form-based plan for a section of the north end of the downtown, and a model bylaw for form-based zoning. He asked that copies be provided for each ARA member.

Mr. Coull recommended that the ARA approach ACP about its willingness to help develop and implement such a plan for the Gateway District as an urban renewal plan. Public participation would be built into the process. Mr. Wolnik spoke of his experience with a form-based zoning exercise during the Master Plan process that had used the Amity Street site as a model.

Mr. Hayden noted that ACP had had a highly-engaged public process.

Michael Alpert, an owner of property on Butterfield Terrace, said that he and other residential property owners there (he indicated the Donovans, who were present) were interested in being part of the Gateway project. He suggested that the student housing component of the project could be brought around the corner onto Butterfield Terrace, leaving North Pleasant Street more available for mixed business and campus uses. James Donovan indicated that it would provide an opportunity to address traffic issues, as well.

Mr. Coull said it might take more than the ARA’s remaining \$58,000 to accomplish everything. He strongly felt that consultants were needed. He recommended that the ARA seek proposals for a form-based analysis and urban renewal plan for the area, with a separate invitation for funding.

Mr. Shaffer said that for North Amherst Village, the ARA would need to decide the respective role(s) of the ARA and property owners—who was going to undertake which aspects of the project.

Ms. La Cour encouraged the ARA to open up the consultant search to local firms, who would be more likely be familiar with state law regarding urban renewal projects.

Barry Roberts encouraged the ARA to support more extensive rezoning of the area between the downtown and the UMass campus, including around Kendrick Park. There was general agreement on the part of the ARA members present that a rezoning should examine the entire area, including the north end of the downtown.

Mr. Hayden said that such an effort would need to very carefully examine the business/residential boundaries.

### **Next Meetings**

The next meeting was set for Wednesday, April 28, with future meetings on May 13 and 27.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Planning Director

Approved:

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ARA Chair